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How Can Europe Border Russia? For a Grassroots Perspective of the Borderlands

June 25–26 | School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute (EUI), Florence

Organized by: School of Transnational Governance (EUI); Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development; LUISS Guido Carli University

Conference Overview

This interdisciplinary conference explores how Europe can border Russia by shifting the focus from high-level geopolitics to grassroots perspectives. It distinguishes between borders as lines drawn on maps and the contested spaces along them — where diverse communities must coexist, where identities and economies stretch across, and where unfinished arrangements often outlast the negotiations that produced them. Rather than seeking definitive or "just" borders, or questioning the sovereignty of any state, it examines how fairer and more sustainable arrangements may emerge through locally informed, inclusive processes.

Drawing on historical experiences — including the US Inquiry committee that informed the Paris Peace Conference of 1919- the conference foregrounds the lived realities of borderland communities. It aims to unpack complex border questions into human-scale challenges, opening space for practical, cooperative, and forward-looking approaches to border-making.

The conference is academic, field-based, and policy-relevant in spirit, but does not advocate for any specific border configuration. It is organised around four guiding questions:

- *How are citizenship, property, and belonging negotiated in spaces where political boundaries shift but communities do not?*
 - *Can borderland regions become laboratories of pragmatic cooperation, even where political reconciliation remains out of reach?*
 - *What can the experience of borderland nations and post-Soviet de facto territories teach about the architecture of sustainable border arrangements?*
 - *How can the European Union develop a border policy that goes beyond enlargement and sanctions, and that listens to the borderlands themselves?*
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Day 1 – June 25

12:30 – 13:00 | Welcome by Johanna Mair, Director of STG

Opening remarks by Fabrizio Tassinari, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Ghia Nodia (conference organizers)

The conference opens by setting out its central question — how Europe can border Russia — and outlining a grassroots, interdisciplinary approach. The speakers will introduce the aims, scope, and intellectual framework guiding the discussions.

13:00 – 14:30 | Bordering Russia: The Great Historical Asymmetry

Introductory Remarks: Alexander Etkind, Bogdan Popescu, Alexander Baunov, Ghia Nodia

Chair: Carolina De Stefano

This session examines the historical legacies shaping the asymmetrical relation of Russia and its neighbours after the disappearance of rival empires. It situates current challenges within longer trajectories of imperial contraction and expansion, shifting sovereignties, and contested spaces of belonging.

Coffee Break

14:30 – 16:30 | Addressing Cross-Border Issues of Identity and Citizenship

Introductory Remarks: Jelena Dzankic, Tornike Gordadze, Camilla Pagani

Chair: Alina Mungiu-Pippidi

Focusing on everyday realities in border regions, this panel explores how identity, citizenship, and belonging are negotiated across political boundaries, drawing inspiration also from past peace processes (e.g. the Balkans). It highlights institutional arrangements that could shape coexistence between majorities and minorities whose status may shift across borders. The panel also addresses the impact on the political instrumentalization of religion and cultural heritage and the response of communities.

Coffee Break

17:00 – 18:30 | The Architecture of Unfinished Borders: Regional Experiences from Europe's Central-Eastern Edge

Introductory Remarks: Radosław Markowski, Carolina De Stefano, Denis Cenușă

Chair: Matteo Bonomi

Between ceasefire and settlement lies an architecture of unfinished borders — improvised arrangements that were never meant to last but have shaped life along Europe's central-eastern edges for decades. What lessons do these arrangements offer for settlements still to come, and what would it take to move from improvisation to durable architecture?

20:00 | Dinner

Day 2 – June 26

09:30 – 11:00 | Borders and Economic Cooperation

Introductory Remarks: Iryna Shushko, Laure Delcour, Leila Alieva, Inna Melnykovska

Chair: Fabrizio Tassinari

This session takes a leap forward to understanding if trade and economic cooperation more generally can bypass and survive the war or even grow into an alternative to war. What economic geography is sustainable on a regional and continental scale?

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:00 | The Other Borders. Perspectives from beyond the frontlines

Introductory Remarks: Igor Munteanu, Alexander Iskandaryan

Chair: Ghia Nodia

Between imperialism, colonialism and nationalism, how can smaller nations avoid becoming chronic borderlands and peripheries of mega-polities? How can bordering both Europe and Russia be successfully managed?

13:00 – 14:30 | Working lunch. Next Steps

Moderators: Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Fabrizio Tassinari

Is there sufficient systematic knowledge of the borderlands? Are grassroots and alternative perspectives heard enough to the great geopolitical interests? Does this warrant a joint project, a publication, a petition? Open brainstorming

14:30 – 16:00 | The EU Russia outlook and border policy

Introductory Remarks: Maria-Giulia Amadio Vicerè and Matteo Bonomi (joint paper), Tom Casier, Oksana Antonenko

Chair: Jan Zielonka

Beyond the European Neighborhood Policy and struggling to find a voice in the peace process, how can the EU find a border policy and a Russia policy beyond just EU enlargement and Russia sanctions? What kind of Eastern border benefits Europe and is sustainable? How can this be imagined, sustained and communicated? The session also engages with critical perspectives on EU–Russia re-bordering in the current war context.

16:00. Closing and departures

Name	Affiliation	Country
1. Iryna Sushko	Institute of Mathematics, National Academy	Ukraine
2. Leo Litra	ECFR	Ukraine and Moldova
3. Sasha Etkind	Central European University. Russia	Russia
4. Jan Zielonka	Oxford University	Poland
5. Radoslaw Markowski	Polish Academy of Science	Poland
6. Adam Holesch	Research Fellow and Network Manager at IBEI	Poland
7. Tom Casier	University of Groningen	UK
8. Syuzanna Va- silian	Assistant Professor and Jean Monnet Chair of European Studies in the Political Science and International Affairs program	Armenia
9. Alexander Is- kandaryan	Yerevan Caucasus Institute	Armenia
10. Bogdan Popescu	John Cabot University in Rome	Romania
11. Denis Cenusă	Associate Expert at the Center for Eastern European Studies (Lithuania)	Moldova
12. Igor Munte- anu	Professor at ASEM	Moldova
13. Jelena Dzankic	EUI	BIH
14. Ghia Nodia	Co-Director of the Global Citizenship Observatory (GLOBALCIT)	Georgia
15. Tornike Zour- abashvili	Researcher, Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP)	Georgia
16. Leila Alieva	Oxford	Azerbaijan
17. Aron Buzogany	Assistant professor at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU)	Hungary
18. Camilla Pa- gani	Assistant Professor at the Università Bocconi	Italy
19. Alina Mungiu- Pippidi	LUISS	Romania

20. Carolina De Stefano	LUISS	Italy
21. Maria-Giulia Amadio Vicerè	LUISS	Italy
22. Matteo Bonomi	IAI	Italy
23. Inna Melnykowska	EUI	Ukraine
24. Oksana Antonenko	EUI	Russia
25. Fabrizio Tassinari	EUI	Italy
26. Alexander Baunov	EUI	Russia
27. Laure Delcour	Sorbonne	
28. Laurentiu Plesca	Black Sea Trust	Romania
29. Marius Ghincea	ETH Zurich	Romania
30. Serena Giusti	Professor of International Relations at Link University in Rome	Italy